

THE CENTENARY OF JOHANN NEPOMUK CZERMAK *

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At the November meeting of the New York Laryngological Society, the President called attention to the fact that the year 1928 marked the centenary of the birth of Professor Johann Czermak, the perfecter of the technique of laryngoscopy and rhinoscopy, and proceeded to commemorate the event as follows:

The members of this Society and of the Academy of Medicine will recollect with pleasure the visit several years ago of Dr. Ferdinand Nager, Professor of Oto-laryngology in the University of Zurich. We can never forget the charming personality of the man nor the distinguished professional achievements which have placed him in the forefront of his contemporaries.

During the early part of the past summer a package was received from Professor Nager containing a complete and perfect edition of the works of Professor Czermak. Following this a letter arrived from him which after some friendly preliminaries read as follows: "By this mail I send you for your medical historical collection some pictures which I should like to present to you. They represent Czermak in his demonstration of laryngoscopy. You probably know that on June 17th, 1928, was his one hundredth birthday. His daughter reminded me of the date, so at our meeting of the Swiss Otological Society I offered some remarks about him. As you have the collection of all his papers, already sent to you, you will find in volume third his biography, by his friend the famous Anton Springer, who later on was a well known publisher in the history of art. Perhaps you will have occasion to remember Professor Czermak in your Laryngological Society, based on the details of this biography.

* Delivered before the New York Laryngological Society, November, 1928.

I believe it to be our duty to remember the work of our predecessors.

I hope to see you at the International Congress at Copenhagen, or at least to get some news of you from your American friends. With kindest regards, I remain,

Yours very sincerely,

F. R. NAGER."

Pursuant to the suggestion of Professor Nager, let me offer the following testimonial to the life and work of the man who, before all others of his time, was instrumental in the development of the laryngoscope.

Johann Nepomuk Czermak was born in Prag, Bohemia, June 17th, 1828, of excellent parentage. His grandfather had been a successful physician and his father was the leading practitioner in Prag, having among his clientele the families of the most aristocratic and influential people. The position attained by Johann Czermak himself as Professor of Physiology in the University of Leipsic, fully attests *his* prominence. He distinguished himself not only through his lectures, but through numerous published contributions of marked scientific value, covering a somewhat wide field. To us the most interesting are those which relate to the upper air passages in general and in particular to his recognition of the value of the idea of the laryngoscope and his zeal in developing its possibilities and in instructing the world at large in its practical application.

It was Czermak who, appreciating the neglected idea of Mr. Liston and of Manuel Garcia, adapted it to general usage by suggesting the cardinal principles of the technique of laryngoscopy and perfectly elaborating them, as the following recital will explain: Liston, Garcia, and even Turck whose claim of priority over Czermak provoked endless discussion, used sunlight as the illuminating power, their examinations being thus restricted to periods of clear weather, and, incidentally speaking, confined to experiments made upon specially trained, tolerant individuals.

Czermak first called attention to the disadvantages of depending upon sunlight and introduced the use of artificial light. Having demonstrated the advantages thus secured, he developed a second innovation—the concentration of the light by means of a concave mirror, the center of which was perforated to enable the transmission of the rays to the observer's eye. He also devised a contrivance by which the staff to which the mirror was attached was held between the observer's teeth. He soon abandoned this device substituting the spectacle frame, and later the head band, as suggested by his contemporary, Semeleder. He also improved the small dental mirror, especially advocating the use of highly polished steel. Combining these ideas he evolved the principles which with their numerous modifications are employed to-day, namely, the use of artificial light, the concave head mirror, and the improved small mirrors. The articles describing this development appeared in 1858, presenting a remarkable achievement for one barely thirty years of age. In the spring of '58, Czermak announced a new principle for the examination of the larynx—the method of transillumination, apparently his own original idea. This is set forth and illustrated in the article on the laryngoscope, published in his collected writings, Volume III, page 501. This same article is otherwise beautifully illustrated and gives clear, explicit and comprehensive explanations of his methods.

But Czermak did not stop at the development of laryngoscopy. It was he, again, who in 1858 first demonstrated the possibility of the examination of the upper pharynx, developed and demonstrated the method of accomplishing this, and so inaugurated rhinoscopy.

Already he had developed the art of auto-laryngoscopy.

As early as 1861, he conceived and announced the idea of photographing the interior of the larynx, with the aid of the laryngoscope. In 1859 he began to publish original observations upon the physiology of the larynx and of speech, and in the same year contributed studies upon various pathological conditions of the larynx.

From the simple relation of these facts the genius of Czermak is evident. Whatever claims may have been made by his contemporaries, the contributions of none were equal either in number or in basic importance to his. We therefore are fully justified in according to him the first, the highest rank, and in paying tribute to him on this occasion.

Following this introduction four large and beautiful pictures were displayed, the gift of Professor Nager, representing a portrait of Czermak, his method of autolaryngoscopy, and his method of laryngoscopy, and a portrait of his friend and biographer, Anton Springer.

There was also presented, as illustrating the progress of the development of laryngology and rhinology, portraits of Dr. Philip Sing Physick, of Philadelphia, the inventor of the prototype of the modern tonsillotome, a description of which was published just one hundred years ago; of Horace Green, Father of Laryngology, and of Gurdon Buck, Father of Intralaryngeal Surgery, both of New York; of Manuel Garcia, Czermak, Semeleder; of Turck of Vienna, the great instructor, Czermak's rival in regard to priority, and of certain others who had notably advanced the specialty in this country, including portraits of pioneers such as Solis-Cohen, Bosworth, Roe, O'Dwyer, Lefferts, French, Bryan, John Mackenzie, Hooper and Ingals.

The three volume set of the biography and works of Czermak, the gift of Professor Nager, was displayed. Attention was called to the presence in the collection of Dr. Delavan of a fine bust of Czermak which he had obtained in Buda Pesth twenty years ago, and to a perfect and complete specimen of the original laryngoscopic apparatus of Czermak, originally secured by Tiemann and Company, and obtained directly from them.

ON MOTION a unanimous vote of thanks and appreciation was tendered to Professor Nager for the thoughtful and friendly interest manifested in his communication and gifts.